THIRUKKURAL EXPRESS

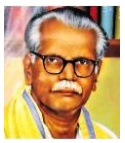
Fortnightly Published every first and third Sundays

Honorary Editors: Thirukkuralar Dr. R. Prabhakaran-

& Dr. Mrs. C. Rajeswari

Executive Editor: Dr.Maraimalai Ilakkuvanar

Thiruvalluvar Era: 2056 Purattasi—26 C.E.:2025-October-12



Kaviyak Kavignar Karunanandham:

A Centenary Salute to a Renaissance Voice

(October 15, 1925 – October 15, 2025)

This October, the Tamil literary world bows in reverence to celebrate the ‘‘centenary of Kavignar S. Karunanandham’‘, an illustrious poet, orator, translator, and journalist whose pen captured the pulse of a transformative century. Born on ‘‘October 15, 1925’‘, in the fertile soil of Thanjavur district, Karunanandham rose to become a ‘‘Renaissance figure of twentieth-century Tamil letters’‘, fusing poetic grandeur with political consciousness, and literary elegance with social commitment.

‘‘A Poet of Epic Vision’‘

Not for Sale

Published by: International Thirukkural Virtual Institute

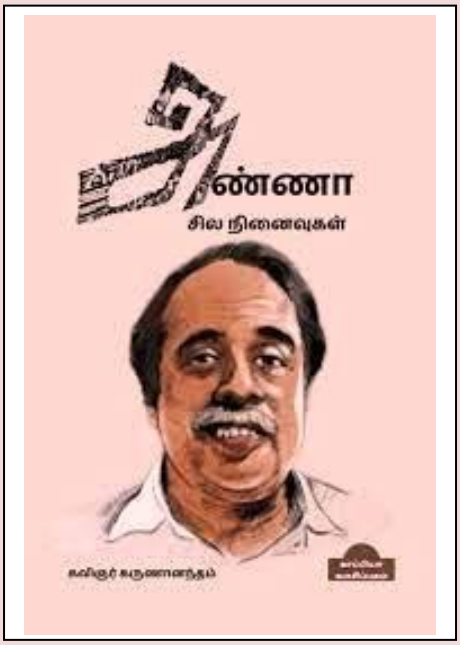
Among modern Tamil poets, Karunanandham occupies a unique niche as a ‘‘“Kaviyak Kavignar”‘‘—an epic poet who reclaimed the kaaviyam form to chronicle contemporary history. His magnum opus, ‘‘*Anna Kaaviyam’‘*, stands as a towering poetic monument to the life and legacy of ‘‘C.N. Annadurai’‘, founder of the Dravidian Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. In this work, Karunanandham brought together the ‘‘classical epic structure’‘ and ‘‘modern political narrative’‘, portraying Anna not merely as a statesman but as a cultural hero who rekindled the Tamil spirit through language, rationalism, and compassion.

The poem’s twenty-seven cantos trace Anna’s journey from his birth in Kanchipuram to his rise as a leader of the masses, the founding of the DMK, his triumphant electoral ascent, and his enduring legacy. Karunanandham wove into these cantos the ‘‘political history of Tamil Nadu’‘, the ‘‘linguistic struggles’‘, the ‘‘rationalist movement’‘, and the ‘‘mass awakening through theatre and cinema’‘. In doing so, he achieved what few poets of his time dared—to make ‘‘contemporary politics the subject of epic poetry’‘.

‘‘Chronicler of Ideological Giants’‘

Karunanandham’s literary canvas extended far beyond a single epic. His biography of ‘‘Thanthai Periyar E.V. Ramasamy’‘ earned him the title of *Periyar’s Biographer*. His prose work *Anna Sila Ninaivugal* preserved precious personal reflections on Annadurai, offering readers both ‘‘historical insight’‘ and ‘‘intimate remembrance’‘. Through works such as *Pookkadu* and *Sumaythangi*, he revealed a lyrical sensibility attuned to both the subtleties of human emotion and the fervour of social change.

‘‘A Life of Service through the Word’‘



Karunanandham’s journey began humbly in the ‘‘postal department’‘, later serving as ‘‘Deputy Director in the Department of Information’‘of the Tamil Nadu government. Yet his true vocation lay in ‘‘literature and public life’‘. As a journalist and orator associated with the ‘‘Dravidian movement’‘, he became one of its most articulate cultural voices. His writings are marked by clarity, rhythmic intensity, and an unwavering belief in the ‘‘power of language to awaken society’‘.

‘‘Recognition and Immortality’‘

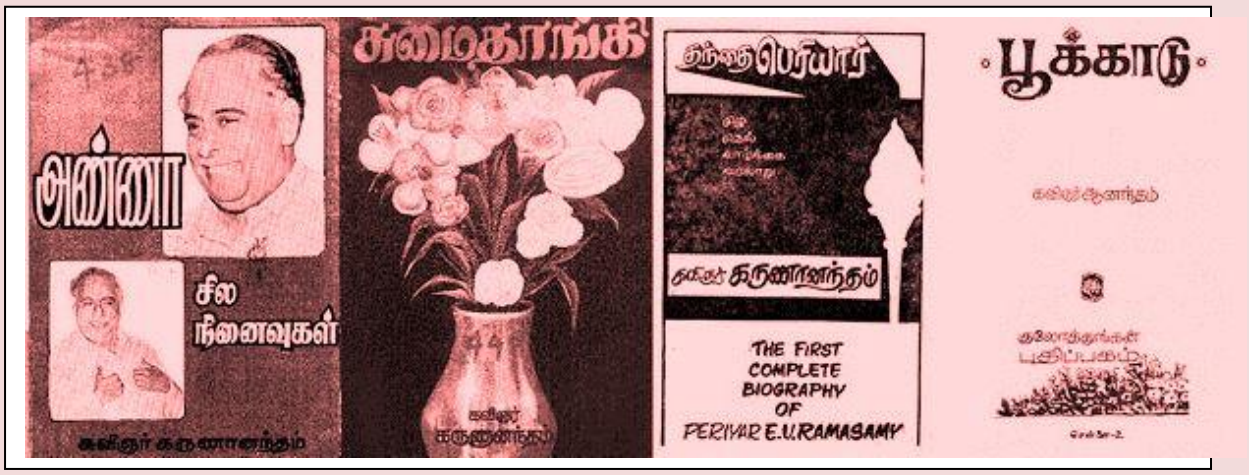
The Government of Tamil Nadu’s decision to ‘‘nationalize his works’‘ is a fitting recognition of their cultural and historical value. Karunanandham belongs to that rare generation of poets who saw themselves not apart from society, but ‘‘as instruments of its renewal’‘. His voice resonates with the cadence of Kamban, the reason of Periyar, and the passion of Anna—an extraordinary synthesis that ensured his place in the Tamil literary pantheon.

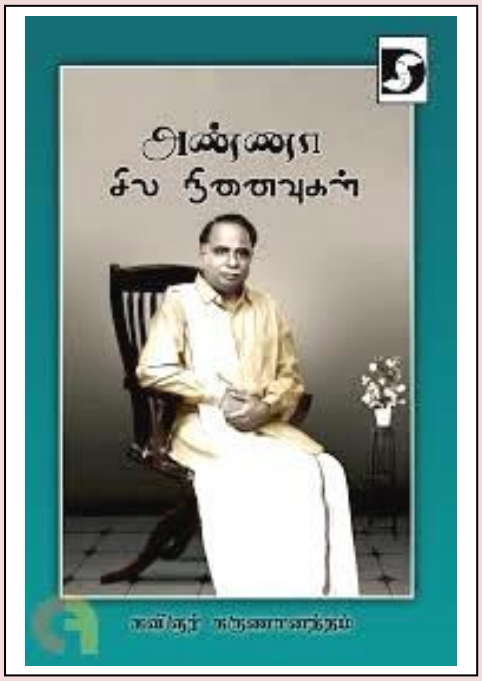
‘‘Centenary Reflections’‘

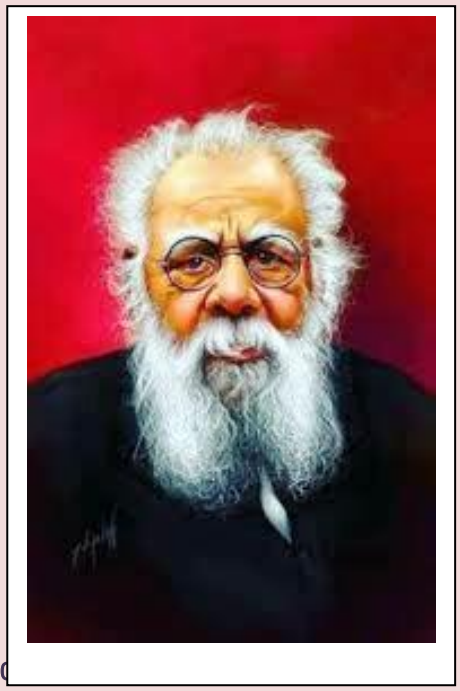
As we mark one hundred years since his birth, ‘‘Kavignar Karunanandham’s legacy shines with undimmed brilliance’‘. He demonstrated that poetry could be both ‘‘majestic and militant’‘, both ‘‘aesthetic and activist’‘. His works remind us that the

poet's task is not merely to decorate the world with verse, but to ''interpret, shape, and uplift it''.

In felicitating his centenary, *Thirukkural Express* honours not only a single poet but also a ''literary epoch'' that he helped shape. His pen kindled a torch that continues to illuminate the paths of scholars, poets, and social reformers.
May the centenary of Kaviyak Kavignar S. Karunanandham ''inspire new generations to blend literary excellence with social vision'', just as he did with unflinching dedication.







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Anna Kaaviyam:

An Overview

Dr.S.S.Kumar M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., Hon. Scholar In-Residence, Professor of English (formerly of) Presidency College (Autonomous), Chennai - 600 005. RESEARCH SCHOLARS' LIBRARY

‘’Translation is the reverse alchemy of transforming gold into Copper." observed a pessimist .But this is not true in this case.

Prof Ilakkuvanar and his Son Dr. Maraimalai Ilakkuvanar belong to a rare and unique group of Tamil Professors who have translated Tamil works into English. While the father translated Tholkappiyam English, his son has translated Thirukkural and Silappadikaram in English. Now "Anna Kaviyam" is an additional feather in his cap. Most of the translators prefer blank verse. But Dr. Maraimalai has chosen rhymed verse and succeeded in retaining the spirit of the original as evidenced in the following lines:

"No prince, no pundit ever made

A mark so deep as Anna laid’’

Conjeevaram Natarajan Annadurai, endearingly called Anna (elder brother) heralded a unique tradition of brotherhood in the socio-political milieu of

TamilNadu.Anna; a leader of the masses was undeterred by his initial failure in elections. This is well portrayed in the following lines:

But fate was harsh and people blind

He lost the vote yet won the mind!!

Though Anna lost a battle, he won the war. He was an excellent orator to the masses as well as the parliamentarians. His maiden speech in the parliament is described thus:

"I am the envoy of the street

of those who live with blistered feet

I speak for the voiceless, the humble, and the poor

For those who knock at no king's door.''

Figures of speech in English are words or phrases that convey meaning in a non-literal way, using creative language to enhance expression, create imagery, and evoke emotions. Simile is a figure of speech employed by poets to make their works more impressive. Mere narration of events may suit in biography in prose. Similes in this epic shine like gems embedded in a gold ornament. While referring to Periyar's mysterious visit to Thiruvannamalai causing political confusion about leanings or shifts, the following simile is used:

"Anna, heartbroken said not a word

Like thunder caught inside a bird.

He mourned the legacy fading fast

The future blurred by shadows cast."

Another apt simile explains the nature of the Tamil heart:

When bronze is heated in searing flame

It turns to gold, not blackened shame

Even if jails give pain and grief

The Tamil heart won't seek relief".

Before reading this translation I was just an onlooker enjoying the flow of Cauvery. This unique work has pulled me inside the whirlpool of the Dravidian love from which I cannot escape forever. Tamil, the most ancient as well as the modern classical language in the world needs more exports than imports. Dr. Maraimalai Ilakkuvanar deserves all praise as an exporter par excellence.

-Vanmuhil

I enjoyed reading it, and I hope you will too.

----R. Kannan

Former Senior United Nations political official, Chennai.

Percy Bysshe Shelley's friend Horace Smith stayed with the poet in 1817. One evening, they began to discuss the discoveries following Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798.

They remembered the Roman historian Diodorus Siculus reporting the inscription on the statue of Ozymandias (Rameses II and possibly the pharaoh referred to in the Book of Exodus), the largest in Egypt, as follows: 'King of Kings Ozymandias am I. If any want to know how great I am and where I lie, let him outdo me in my work.' Neither the statue nor the splendour of pharaonic Egypt survived.

Shelley then penned "Ozymandias," lampooning the statue and its claim.

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Although time has rendered memories of Ozymandias a distant past, Shelley has won an immortal place for himself. Poetry is a powerful medium, and Shelley was one of the greatest poets.

The Tamils prize poetry dearly. The Sangam odes speak to the prowess and valour of kings. Equally, they hail their munificence. The odes have outlived their protagonists because of their sheer beauty. In the eastern world, bards praised their rulers in return for gifts.

After India became a republic, there were no kings to praise. However, in their place rose colossuses as leaders, wielding more sway over their people than any king could have ever hoped for. One such person in the deep south was C.N. Annadurai, the late chief minister of Tamil Nadu, fondly known as Anna or elder brother to his thambis or younger brother-like followers.

He made it possible for people of modest backgrounds to rise to heights that they could only dream of. Poet Karunanandham was one of his closest cohorts. Hailing from a middling community known more for its martial than poetic skills Karunanandham came to be known by the moniker Kavignar Karunanandham in the Dravidian Movement because of his poetic proficiency. A consummate writer Karunanandham rose to become the deputy director of the state's public information department under Kalaignar Karunanidhi's stewardship and his known for both his memoirs and his work on Periyar.

Anna's untimely death in harness ensured his image and fame would last longer. On the occasion of Karunanandham's birth centenary, his Tamil panegyric for his departed leader has been rendered in delightful English by Professor Ilakuvanar Maraimalai.

Professor Maraimalai approached me to write a preface to his translation, as I had penned Anna's biography in English for his birth centenary. I have been drawn to the movement and its leaders as I was born and raised in the north of the then Madras, not far from where the DMK's launch was held on September 18, 1949. Much water has flowed down the bridge since, and four generations later, Anna remains a figure remembered by the Dravidian parties at least in their manifestoes,

party flags and backdrops. Time has a cruel hand and mercilessly chisels away memories.

I have known Professor Maraimalai since my New College days in the early 1980s. Although he was teaching at Presidency College, he was known to students like me, eager and ambitious to become the future of the state. Accessible and friendly, Professor Maraimalai was a friend and a counsellor.

A scholar of repute Professor Maraimalai remains as energetic and vigorous as he was in his younger days. He has had a soft corner for me and although we had not been in touch for some decades I was able to reconnect with him seamlessly on my retirement and return home.

Anna was a fascinating leader, and it is an onerous task to do justice to his persona and leadership. Both Poet Karunanandham and Professor Maraimalai have carried out their tasks with great elan. The following quatrain neatly captures Anna's purpose, and the rhymes are most apt.

To give the masses wings to rise,
To open up their sleeping eyes.
He called on youth to lead the land—
To build with heart, with head, with hand.

The Dravidian Movement leveraged education as a tool of social mobility. Hailing from a modest background, Anna was able to complete his studies at Pachaiyappas College thanks to a scholarship for the backwards classes. Pachaiyyapas was a philanthropist of renown, and little would he have realised that the math wizard Ramanujan or Anna would be trained in an institution founded from his benevolence. Professor Maraimalai speaks of education as a greater gift than heaps of gold praising the philanthropist:

Such was the dream of Pachaiyappa's bold,
A gift more great than heaps of gold.
And there, our Anna humbly came,
To chase the light, to build his name.

On Anna’s apprenticeship with the venerable Periyar he has the following to say:

He entered not the path of gold,
But joined the cause both true and bold.
With Periyar, the fearless sage,
He turned the tide, he set the stage.

And how did Anna turn the tide? Professor Maraimalai explains the egalitarian nature of Anna’s persona and his DMK, and how the leader spoke the idiom of the masses.

Caste and creed he cast aside,
And lit the lamps of Tamil pride.
Though English ruled the educated then,
He wrote and spoke to common men.

Anna’s tenure lasted only twenty-three months, and for some of that time, he was battling his terminal illness. Yet, Anna is known for naming the state Tamil Nadu, not to mention the two-language formula. Professor Maraimalai captures it thus in the following quatrain:

"Tamil Nadu," he proudly named
And Tamil hearts in chorus flamed
What better name for this great land
Than one that bears the mother’s hand?

This translation can easily pass off as the original. I enjoyed reading it, and I hope you will too.

R. Kannan

The author of The DMK Years and a former senior United Nations political official

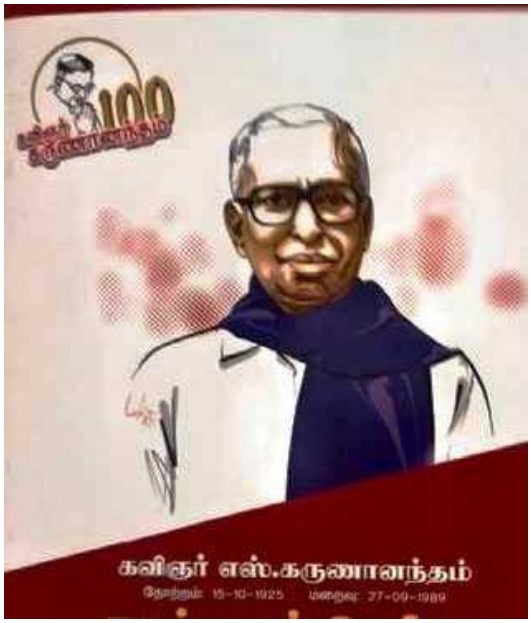
Chennai

August 6, 2025

Fascinating chapters every word

Fit to become history in gold!

Dr.Soma. Ilangovan



Tamil literature has seen many lighthouses

Kings and common man shining in them!

Then a darkness came and swallowed

The history was forgotten to enslavement!

Unknown language backward culture

Cunningly enshrined and conquered!

Then came the revolution by a few

Star was born in the name of Periyar!

He mesmerized the youth with his

Socratean discussions to reach one and all!

Culture and Language were resuscitated

Youth turned to him with energy

Turning the masses in a new knowledge

Pride returned and the words were

Spoken in a new wave of style and structure

Writings spilled honey mixed with truths

Anna led the army of the youth

Nook and corner were filled

With new pride and knowledge

In dramas and movies Tamil pride

Came back with a vengeance!

A big mountain was shattered with a chisel!

The story was written in pride poems

Kavingar Karunanandham wrote

Not in words but like a roaring Lion!

Fascinating chapters every word

Fit to become history in gold!

Tamil poems by him now comes

In English verses of value

Maraimalai Ilakkuvanar's task

Not an easy one as history

Made in campuses and jails

Streets and stages

Movie theaters and books

Letters to brothers written with love

All have been told with faith and love!

Let this be a peace of literature

That will ring loud and clear

Enlightening the Great Anna!

_ Soma Ilangovan, Periyar International, U.S.A.

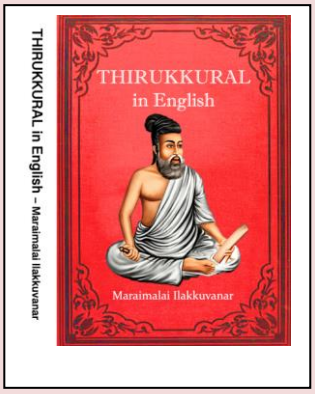
Thiruvalluvar visits Harvard University

For the salvation of entire mankind

Tamilnadu dedicated Thiruvalluvar

Its fame rose sky level

For having given such a scripture noble.



Dr.Vijay Janakiraman and Dr.Thirugnanasambandham, founders of the Harvard Tamil chair Trust recently (on 9th October) had gone to Harvard University; They had presented a copy of Thirukkural in English, translated by Maraimalai Ilakkuvanar and also his research book titled “Glimpses of Thirukkural ’Along with these books they have also presented a couple of books.

We thank the philanthropists for such a nice gesture with an intention to propagate Thirukkural in the proper direction. We can hear it through the words of Dr.V.Janakiraman:

“My self and Dr. Sambandam went to Harvard and met Harvard Tamil Chair Head, Professor Martha Shelby and presented several Tamil Books authored and translated by Professor Maraimalai Ilakkuvanar.

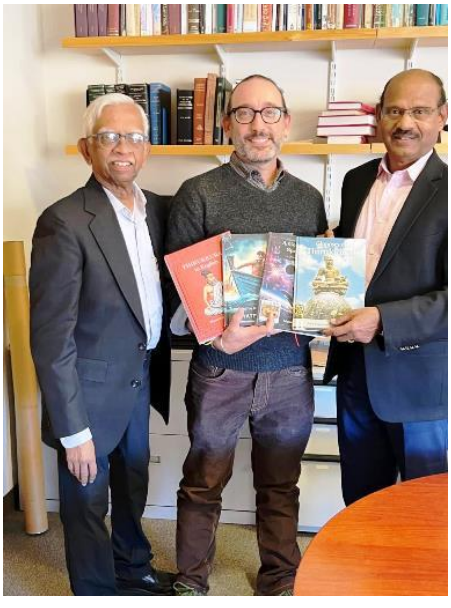
Another set of Books were presented to

Mr. Jonathan Ridley, Senior preceptor Tamil.

South Asian studies at Harvard.

One set of Books would be in the

Harvard Library (Tamil section)

We hope the mission would continue till

Every university in U.S.gets Thirukkural.